

Hoke County Natural Area Inventory

FORT BRAGG LITTLE RIVER BENDS

Site Significance: national
USGS Quadrangle: Lobelia

Size: 133 acres
Ownership: US Dept. of Defense

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: This natural area contains an outstanding cluster of rare elements associated with the terraces of Lower Little River. Included are two of the best examples of Mesic Pine Flatwoods (Little River Variant), a community restricted to this river; a large population of Georgia indigo-bush (*Amorpha georgiana* var. *georgiana*); and a large population of Alabama beaksedge (*Rhynchospora crinipes*). A concentration of five Federal Species of Concern plant species and one FSC animal occur here: Georgia indigo-bush, Alabama beaksedge, Sandhills milk-vetch (*Astragalus michauxii*), Sandhills pyxie-moss (*Pyxidanthera barbulate* var. *brevifolia*), Pickering's morning-glory (*Stylisma pickeringii* var. *pickeringii*), and Bachman's Sparrow (*Aimophila aestivalis*). The xeric terrace supports a Sand Barren community (rare in the North Carolina Sandhills) and the state's only extant population of Carolina pineland-cress (*Warea cuneifolia*). This is an excellent stretch of blackwater river, with intact shore vegetation, seepage banks, levee forest, and small islands. Mesic terraces support the highest species diversity of any plant community on Fort Bragg and possibly the state - 142 species have been documented within a 20x50 meter plot.

LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS: Little River Bends is located within Fort Bragg's Northern Training Area along the south side of Little River, 1.4 miles east of Raeford-Vass Road, north of Manchester Road, and bounded on the east side by Deep Creek. It lies adjacent to the Little River Trillium Slopes Significant Natural Heritage Area and a mile west-southwest of Turkey Creek SNHA.

SITE DESCRIPTION: This natural area consists of wet to xeric, nearly flat terraces occupying three loops of Lower Little River. The southwestern portion is elevated slightly (6-9 feet), possesses xeric soil, and has been planted with longleaf pine. Wiregrass (*Aristida stricta*) is abundant and the community supports many dry soil specialist plants. Towards the river this xeric upper terrace gives way to lower terraces characterized by more mesic soil, locally with small seasonally wet depressions. These mesic terraces have been logged but otherwise not much disturbed and support a plant community unique to this river: the Little River Variant of Mesic Pine Flatwoods. The xeric terrace descends gradually westward to a Wet Pine Flatwoods with an ill-defined streamhead in which are found a few small Vernal Pools (seasonally inundated depressions). The river itself is characterized by low, steep to vertical clay banks covered with Atlantic white cedar (*Chamaecyparis thyoides*), loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda*), hardwoods, and diverse shrubs. Thick deposits of claystone (Cape Fear Formation) form several shelves that are dry during summer droughts. Four elongated islands within the river channel support a mix of levee forest and sandbar vegetation. Where vertical, the riverbanks are perennially wet with seepage.